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AUTHOR Hosman, Carol Merz; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy (Iannaccone and Lutz, 1970) describes the political process whereby citizens in a reform governmental system, particularly in local school districts, make their values manifest in terms of public policy. The theory consists of four causally related factors; (1) community member values; (2) citizen participation; (3) school board member values; and (4) school policies. After explaining this theory, the paper presents the methodology, design, results, conclusions, and implications of the first 2 years of a 10-year longitudinal study involving all Washington State school boards. The study analyzes boards' conflict episode cycles, beginning with changes in community values, influencing changes in citizen participation, leading to changes in school board member values (new elections), and concluding with changes in school policies. This paper focuses on citizen participation and attempts to provide important forecast information to school administrators concerning changes in educational political climate. Because political conflict often spreads among districts sharing a common economic base or population, the idea is to determine potential "hot spots" by identifying districts with relatively high Thorsted Conflict Indices (TCI's). This hypothesis is supported by numerous charts showing TCI's for Washington educational service districts. Although political conflict associated with the 1985 school board elections was not related to student enrollment, findings suggest that districts with fewer than 500 students experience less conflict than districts with larger enrollments. Included are seven figures and nine references. (MLH)

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ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY DISSATISFACTION: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ELECTORAL CONFLICT ON SCHOOL BOARDS

Carol Merz Hosman

Donald B. Reed

Dennis P. Maguire

Washington State University

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ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY DISSATISFACTION:

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ELECTORAL CONFLICT ON SCHOOL BOARDS

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is threefold. The first is to present the salient aspects of what has come to be known as the Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978). The second is to present the methodology, design, summary of results, and tentative conclusions, of the third phase of a longitudinal study involved with the collection and analysis of data relative to the Dissatisfaction Theory. The third and final purpose is to discuss the implications of the third phase of the longitudinal study for successive phases.

The Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy

The Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy articulated by Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) and elaborated by Lutz and Iannaccone (1978) describes the political process, the contextual factors which affect the process, and the consequences of the process whereby the citizens in a reform governmental system, particularly in local school districts, make their values manifest in terms of public policy. Various presentations of the Dissatisfaction Theory have been offered; details of the theory will not be presented here. However, for purposes of this paper, it is useful to consider the Dissatisfaction Theory as consisting of four related theoretical political factors: (1) community member values (CMV), (2) citizen participation (CP) with respect

to school board elections, (3) school board member values (SBV), and (4) school policies (SP). In the theory these factors are related in a causal chain: change in community values (ΔCV) leads to (--->) change in citizen participation with respect to school board elections (ΔCP), which in turn leads to (--->) change in school board member values (ΔSBV), which in turn leads to (--->) change in school policies (ΔSP). Symbolically the causal chain can be represented as follows:

$$\Delta CMV \longrightarrow \Delta CP \qquad (A)$$

$$\Delta CP \longrightarrow \Delta SBV \qquad (B)$$

$$\Delta SBV \longrightarrow \Delta SP \qquad (C)$$

Since reform governmental structure considerably retards the linkage in (A) in comparison to the linkages in (B) and (C), the causal chain appears episodic rather than continuous. It should be noted that the name of the Dissatisfaction Theory arises from dissatisfaction which occurs among citizens when their values and school policies become incompatible. The causal chain presented above not only describes a political process, but also gives the theory a predictive character.

To study the sequence noted above, a variety of indicators have been employed by various investigators to assess the various theoretical political factors. Change in community values has been indicated by: (1) change in school enrollment and (2) change in district assessed valuation. Change in citizen participation has been indicated by: (1) change in the number of candidates running for seats on a board, (2) change in the number of citizens voting in elections, (3) change in the

distribution of the votes among candidates, and (4) changes in various conflict indices including the Minar (1966), the Thorsted (1974), and the Lutz and Wang (1987). Change in the values held by school board members has been indicated by: (1) change in the number of incumbent defeats, (2) change in board membership, and (3) change in voting pattern on the board. Change in school district policies has been indicated by formal decisions which are intended to make change: (1) the decision to retain or remove a superintendent; (2) when hiring a new superintendent, the decision to hire an inside or outside applicant; (3) the decision to maintain or change a district's organizational structure; (4) the decision to change or retain the present borders of a school district; and (5) the decision to change or retain present purchasing practices.

The Need for a Large Scale Longitudinal Study

The body of literature related to the Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy has spanned nearly two decades. To date the literature has focused on theory development (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970), theory verification (Walden, 1966; Freeborn, 1966; Kirkendall, 1966; Lutz & Wang, 1987), and theory extension and modification (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978). Research methods associated with the literature have been retrospective in character, and the audience to whom the literature has been directed has been primarily academic.

It is reasonable to assert that the literature regarding the Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy, encompassing its various

modifications and extensions as well as its supporting empirical research, has developed to a state where it can be argued with some confidence that the theory has validity with respect to both its descriptive and analytic character, and its predictive qualities. Consistent with this assertion, it seems reasonable to conclude that at least part of current research efforts surrounding the theory should be prospective in character and large scale in scope, and the results of these and other research efforts should be prepared and disseminated with the needs of professional school administrators in mind.

The development and implementation of a large scale prospective study involved with collecting data relevant to the Dissatisfaction Theory would have both practical and theoretical implications. On the theoretical side, such a study designed for at least a ten year period, including all or most all districts in a state, would generate a pool of comparative data which would be useful for the formulation and testing of hypotheses in a prospective rather than retrospective fashion. On the practical side, the collection, summarization, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of the data in such a study would provide important systematic forecast information for professional school administrators regarding changes in district, county, regional, and state political climate.

The state of Washington is a suitable place to conduct a longitudinal study. There are a manageable number of school districts. Currently there are 297 districts which range in student enrollment from those with one room schools containing

few students to that of the Seattle School District with about 46,000 students. All districts have reform boards. With one exception, all boards have five members; the exception is the Seattle School District board which has seven members. With three exceptions, the members on all boards serve four year terms; the exceptions are the Everett, Tacoma, and Vancouver boards which have six year terms. The same election statutes apply to all districts. School board elections are held in the odd years in November. If more than two candidates file for a position, a primary election is held in September. Between elections, if vacancies occur on a board, they are filled through appointment by board action. Appointed members, if they wish to remain on a board, must stand for election at the next election following their appointment.

In the state of Washington school boards may decide whether members will hold positions by director district or by position. If the decision is made to select members by director district, the school district is divided into a number of director districts of approximately equal population equal to the number of board member seats. Members holding board positions or candidates seeking board positions must reside in the director district for which they hold the position or for which they are running. However, regardless of director district, citizens in a school district may vote for candidates in all director districts. If the decision is made to select board members by director position, each position is identified by a number. These positions are not related to any geographical area.

Members hold board positions or candidates seek board positions by specific numbered positions. All citizens in a school district may vote for candidates in all positions. School districts which select board members by position are said to have at large elections. In most boards, the positions are staggered with elections for two positions held during one odd year and elections for three positions held during the following odd year.

A conflict episode is referred to as the sequence which begins with changes in community values, which leads to changes in citizen political participation, which leads to changes in school board member values, and which concludes with changes in school policies. A minimum of ten years would be a useful length for a longitudinal study because the period would encompass five school board elections in the state of Washington, would likely show many changes in board membership, and would be slightly longer than the average conflict episode. Thus, in studying all districts in the state of Washington for at least ten years, some districts should begin to manifest change early in the study and these changes should be traceable for the duration of their conflict episode cycles.

The Longitudinal Study

To date the longitudinal study has consisted of three phases. The first phase was a pilot study (Reed, 1985) involving the school districts (with two exceptions) with the largest student enrollments in each of the 39 counties in the state of Washington. The purposes of the first phase were to develop and

field test a survey instrument, and to assess validly of responses.

Based upon the results of the first phase of the longitudinal study, the second and third phases have been conducted. As noted previously, the purposes of the longitudinal study are both theoretical and practical. From a theoretical perspective, the purpose of the study has been and continues to be to generate a comparative data base, spanning at least a ten year period and including all the school districts in the state of Washington, which is useful for formulating and testing hypotheses relative to the Dissatisfaction Theory of Democracy in a prospective rather than a retrospective fashion. From a practical perspective, the purpose of the longitudinal study has been and continues to be to collect, summarize, analyze, interpret, and disseminate data which will provide important systematic forecast information to school administrators concerning changes in district, county, regional, and state political climate.

Survey Instrument

Consistent with the discussion of the Dissatisfaction Theory presented previously, a self-response survey instrument has been developed. For each of the four factors (1) community member values (CMV), (2) citizen participation with respect to school board elections (CP), (3) school board member values (SBV), and (4) school district policies (SDP), data have been requested which, with annual administrations of the questionnaire, would

indicate changes in the factors. The decision to request particular data in the instrument has been primarily guided by previous studies as well as by estimates of the ease of access to data by superintendents. In some cases, data for indicators of change not used in previous studies have also been requested.

For the factor community member values, two frequently used pieces of demographic data have been requested: (1) district student enrollment and (2) assessed valuation of property in the district. A third and fourth piece of data have also been requested. These are: (3) school district population and (4) number of families in the district with children attending public schools. Informal contacts with superintendents suggested that they have relatively accurate knowledge of these data. It was reasoned that a direct assessment of district population would be more useful than estimates made from student enrollment data. Furthermore, it was reasoned that the change in the ratio of (number of families in the school district with children attending public schools) to (district population) might be shown to be a useful indicator of a change in the factor community member values.

For the factor citizen participation with respect to school board elections, two traditionally employed pieces of data have been requested in the survey instrument: (1) number of candidates running for elections and (2) the distribution of the votes among candidates for both primary and general elections. A third piece of data has also been requested. This is: (3) number of registered voters in the school district.

Superintendents in the state of Washington keep accurate records of these data because of the need to conduct annual and biannual levy elections. It was reasoned that the changes in the ratio: (number of registered voters in the school district) to (school district population) might be shown to be a useful indicator of the change in the factor citizen participation with respect to school board elections.

With respect to the third factor, school board member values, two types of data have been requested. These include: (1) election results at both primary and general elections which would disclose incumbent defeats and (2) board member data which would reveal changes on a board due to appointments and elections in which incumbents chose not to run for reelection.

For the fourth and final factor, school district policies, data for superintendent tenure and turnover have been requested. Furthermore, data regarding the previous position of the superintendent have been sought. Additionally, the dollar figure for the total annual budget has been requested. It was reasoned that changes in the ratio: (total district budget) to (student enrollment) might be useful as an indicator of changes in the school policy factor.

Based upon the four factors of the Dissatisfaction Theory and the indicators of these factors discussed above, two forms of a survey instrument specifically designed for superintendent response have been constructed. The forms vary only in one important aspect. The form developed for use in election years requests election vote data by candidate name for both primary

and general elections. Candidates are identified as either incumbents or nonincumbents. The form developed for use in non-election years requests current board member names and the names of any other individuals who have held board positions during the year. Rather than organizing requests for data in terms of the four factors of the Dissatisfaction Theory, an organization more familiar to superintendents has been used. In the instrument requests for data have been separated into the following sections: School District Data, Superintendent Data, and Board Election Data.

Research Procedures

In the second phase of data collection, covering 1985 elections, survey instruments were mailed out to the superintendents of all 298 school districts in the state of Washington. Of these, 220 were returned, 149 with usable data. Collectively the school districts responding represent 66% of the student enrollment in the state. About half of those not reporting were very small districts with fewer than 500 students. Of the questionnaires returned, many were unusable due to missing vote counts or failure to identify which candidates were incumbents. In some cases, it was possible to complete this information by calling the superintendent's office or the county election officials.

In the third phase of the study, 297 (between 1985 and 1986 two districts were consolidated) survey instruments were mailed out and 180 were returned. This year did not follow a school

board election, hence data gathered represented demographic and economic variables as well as changes in board membership due to appointments.

Analysis of Data

As discussed earlier in this paper, the Dissatisfaction Theory proposes a time-sequenced causal chain of theoretical political factors. The chain includes the following sequence: Change in community values (ΔCV), which in turn leads to change in citizen participation in political activities (ΔCP), which in turn leads to change in school board member values (ΔSBV), which in turn leads to change in school policies (ΔSP). To observe changes in the theoretical factors and their relationship to subsequent factors, a relatively long period of data collection is required. Because the present longitudinal study is in only its second year (third phase) of data collection, it is not useful at this time to do a full analysis of the indicator data relative to all four theoretical factors and the relationships between them. Hence, in this paper, the analysis will focus on a single indicator of one theoretical factor. The factor is citizen political participation, and the analysis of this factor will be accomplished by computing and comparing Thorsted Conflict Indices. Since this indicator involves the 1985 school board elections, most of the following analysis will focus on the 1985 election data.

It is important to note that political conflict stemming from community change often appears to spread among districts

which share a common economic base or population. By identifying districts and regions which have relatively high conflict indices, it is possible to identify "hot spots" for further study.

For the 1985 elections, Thorsted Conflict Indices (TCI's) were calculated for each district and averaged by groups of districts including counties and educational service districts. (County school districts no longer exist in the state of Washington. County school districts were consolidated into multi-county intermediate districts which are called educational service districts.) Characteristics of the educational service districts for the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 school years with respect to number of counties, number of school districts, student enrollment, and percent of student enrollment are displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively. Thorsted Conflict Index averages for the 1985 election for each of the nine educational service districts in the state are presented in Figure 3. The location of the educational service districts and their respective Thorsted Conflict Indices are shown on a map of the state of Washington in Figure 4.

The Thorsted Conflict average for all 149 districts reporting was calculated and found to be 20.2. This stands as an estimate of the political conflict associated with all 1985 school board elections in the state of Washington.

Selected Characteristics of the Educational Service Districts in the State of Washington for 1985-1986 School Year.

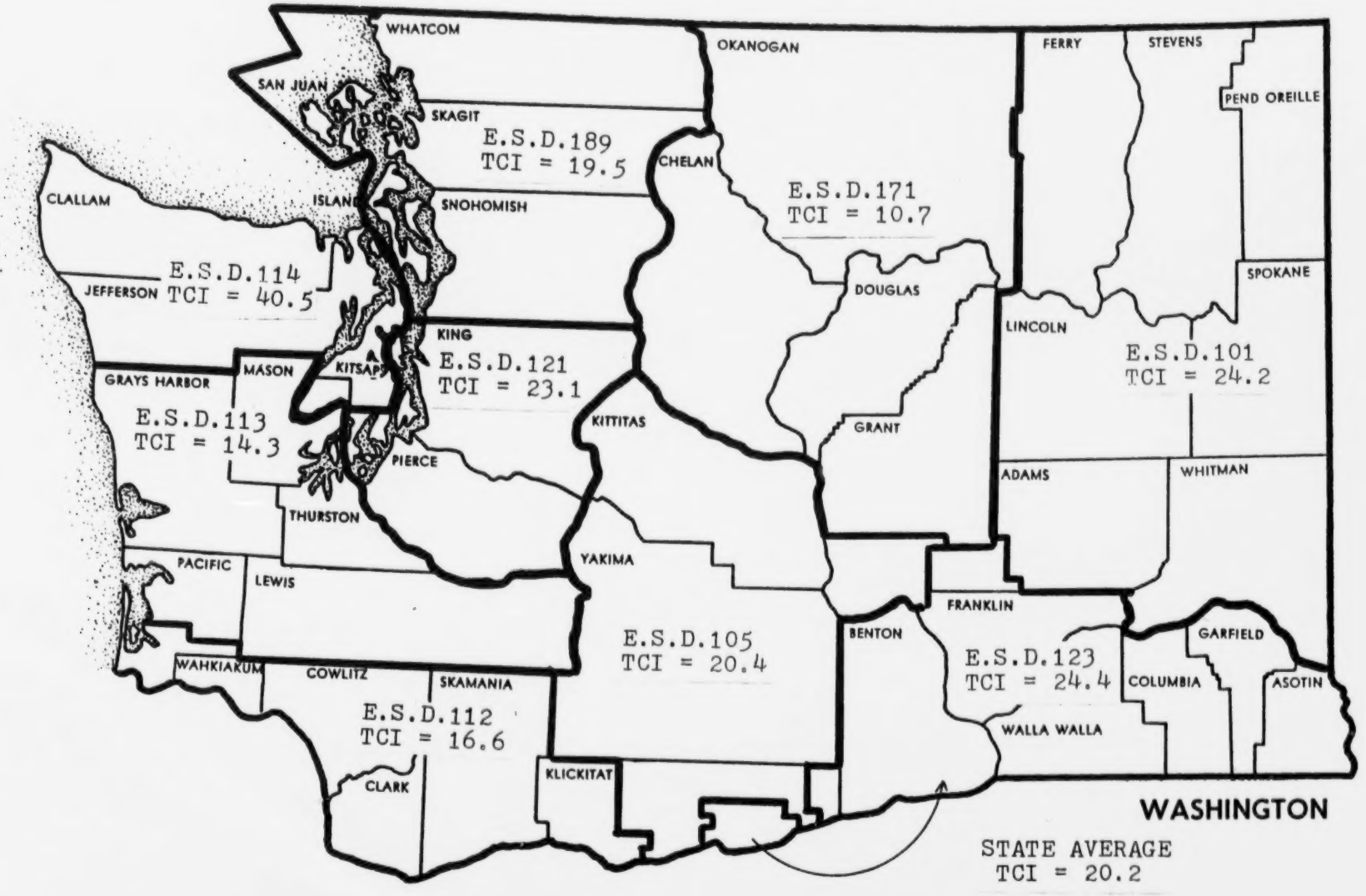
Educational Service District Number	Number of Counties	Number of School Districts	Student Enrollment	Percent of Student Enrollment
101	7	60	78,083	10.4
105	2	25	41,963	5.6
112	5	31	62,835	8.4
113	5	45	56,961	7.6
114	3	15	41,167	5.5
121	2	35	289,957	38.7
123	6	23	43,362	5.8
171	4	29	29,989	4.0
189	5	35	104,282	13.9
Totals	39	298	748,599	99.9

Selected Characteristics of the Educational Service Districts in the State of Washington for the 1986-1987 School Year.

Educational Service District Number	Number of Counties	Number of School Districts	Student Enrollment	Percent of Student Enrollment
101	7	59	78,171	10.3
105	2	25	42,761	5.6
112	5	31	63,641	8.4
113	5	45	58,134	7.6
114	3	15	42,090	5.5
121	2	35	295,408	38.8
123	6	23	44,075	5.8
171	4	29	30,447	4.0
189	5	35	106,993	14.0
Totals	39	297	761,720	100.0

Thorsted Conflict Index Means by Educational Service District for the 1985 School Board Election in the State of Washington.

Educational Service District Number	Number of Districts Reporting, (% Reporting)	Thorsted Conflict Index
101	29(48.3)	24.2
105	14(56.0)	20.4
112	14(45.2)	16.6
113	21(46.7)	14.3
114	5(33.3)	40.5
121	60(60.0)	23.1
123	12(52.2)	24.4
171	16(55.2)	10.7
189	17(48.6)	19.5
Total Number of Districts Reporting:	149(49.8)	Mean Thorsted Conflict Index: 21.54



Educational Service Districts in the State of Washington and Their Respective Thorsted Conflict Index Means for the 1985 School Board Elections

Frequencies of School Districts Exhibiting Thorsted Conflict Indices in Specific Ranges for the 1985 School Board Election in the State of Washington by Educational Service District.

Educational Service District	Thorsted Conflict Index Ranges						Totals
	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	>50	
101	16	3	3	0	3	4	29
105	4	3	3	3	0	1	14
112	5	4	3	1	0	1	14
113	12	2	2	2	2	1	21
114	1	0	0	1	2	1	5
121	7	4	4	4	0	2	21
123	3	4	0	1	3	1	12
171	11	1	1	2	1	0	16
189	8	3	2	1	2	1	17
Totals (%)	67 (45.0)	24 (16.1)	18 (12.1)	15 (10.1)	13 (8.7)	12 (8.1)	149 (100.1)

Among the educational service districts, Number 114, as shown in Figure 3, has a Thorsted Conflict Index of 40.5 which is considerably higher than others. Other educational service districts which have high Thorsted Conflict Indexes include Number 123, TCI=24.4, Number 105, TCI=20.4, and Number 121, TCI=23.1. These areas will be watched closely over the duration of the study to determine if conflict is increasing or decreasing. As shown in Figure 5, 40 districts have Thorsted Conflict Indexes greater than 30. These districts will also be examined closely during the 1987 electoral period to determine if they may be reflecting involvement in dissatisfaction episodes.

Considering the Thorsted Conflict Indexes of the Educational Service Districts and their locations in the state as shown in Figure 4, there does not appear to be a pattern in political conflict within the state. However, examining the districts in terms of an urban-rural index may disclose a pattern.

Thorsted Conflict Indexes for the 1985 school board election were calculated by district student enrollment. Figure 6 presents the Thorsted Conflict Index means for various categories of district student enrollment. In Figure 7 frequencies of school districts exhibiting Thorsted Conflict Indexes in specific ranges for the 1985 school board election are presented for various categories of district student enrollment.

Figure 6

Thorsted Conflict Index Means by Student Enrollment for School Districts in the State of Washington for the 1985-1986 School Year.

Student Enrollment	Number of Districts Reporting	Thorsted Conflict Index
0 - 500	41	11.85
501 - 1,000	22	24.26
1,001 - 2,000	29	24.36
2,001 - 3,000	17	20.53
3,001 - 4,000	7	27.71
4,001 - 5,000	2	0
5,001 - 6,000	6	37.54
6,001 - 7,000	5	15.59
7,001 - 10,000	7	20.61
10,001 - 20,000	10	21.79
20,001 +	3	24.08

Total Number of Districts Reporting: 149

Mean Thorsted Conflict Index: 20.76

Frequencies of School Districts Exhibiting Thorsted Conflict Indices in Specific Ranges for the 1985 School Board Elections in the State of Washington by Student Enrollment.

Student Enrollment	Thorsted Conflict Index Ranges						Totals
	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	>50	
0 - 500	26	2	6	3	2	2	41
501 - 1,000	8	5	3	2	2	2	22
1,001 - 2,000	14	3	3	2	3	4	29
2,001 - 3,000	7	3	1	2	2	2	17
3,001 - 4,000	3	1	1	0	1	1	7
4,001 - 5,000	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
5,001 - 6,000	0	2	1	1	1	1	6
6,001 - 7,000	2	1	1	1	0	0	5
7,001 - 10,000	1	3	1	1	1	0	7
10,001 - 20,000	2	4	0	2	1	1	10
20,001 +	1	0	1	1	0	0	3
Totals	66	24	18	15	13	13	149
(%)	(44.3)	(16.1)	(12.1)	(10.1)	(8.7)	(8.7)	(100.0)

Examination of these figures suggests that political conflict associated with the 1985 school board elections is not related to district student enrollment. However these same figures suggest that districts with very small student enrollment (less than 500 students) tend to have less conflict than districts of larger enrollments. The correlation coefficient between district student enrollments and Thorsted Conflict Indexes is .074 which provides further evidence that district student enrollment and political conflict are not related.

Discussion

The first two years of this study have revealed some methodological problems which need to be addressed immediately as well as indicating some initial substantive findings related to the theory.

Methodological problems centered around collecting accurate data. Incomplete data most often lacked vote counts and indication of which candidates were incumbents. Districts most often failed to record number of votes if a candidate was unchallenged. Districts were not sure whether candidates were considered incumbents if they had been initially appointed to the board and were running for the first time. Respondents were not sure how to report district enrollment (FTE or student count) and whether to count all funds (construction, transportation, etc.) in budget total. Questionnaires were adjusted to assist respondents in these aspects of reporting. Additionally, these initial findings will be reported in state professional meetings

and in state professional publications with the hope that increased awareness of the study will increase the number and accuracy of returns in subsequent years.

Thorsted Conflict Indexes were fairly easily calculated, once accurate electoral results were returned. Grouping by size, educational service district, and county were easily done. Size and educational service district groups appeared most informative. County reporting was informative in large counties, but among the 39 counties in Washington are a number that encompass few small school districts with only a few hundred students. Thus, the size and character of these units are so diverse that few reasonable comparisons can be made.

Districts in which incumbent board members choose not to run for election again pose special problems in calculating a Thorsted Conflict Index. If no incumbents chose to run again, the numerator of the Index ratio becomes 0/0. Some researchers have agreed to interpret this as a value of "1," allowing calculations to proceed. This is justified if a series of elections are examined in which fewer and fewer incumbents run, the numerator of the Thorsted Conflict Index formula approaches 1. However, this assumption makes the Index very large (>90) and does not always seem to fit other observations of the district. Size and regional averages, including districts of this type, may be artificially high.

A more troublesome event occurs when some, but not all, incumbents choose to run, creating instances in which the average number of votes for incumbents is greater than the average number

of votes for all candidates. This creates a negative Thorsted Conflict Index. The formula for the Thorsted Conflict Index is:

$$TCI = 100 - 100\left[\frac{\bar{X}_{vi}}{\bar{X}_{vc}}\right]$$

where $\bar{X}_{vi}$ = mean votes for incumbents and $\bar{X}_{vc}$ = mean votes for all candidates. If $\bar{X}_{vi} > \bar{X}_{vc}$, then TCI < 0. Since a negative Thorsted Conflict Index is meaningless in relation to the theory, researchers are considering other calculations and alternative formulas to indicate political conflict. The data will be re-examined in light of these alternative formulae, namely Hunt's challenge index and Lutz and Wang's dissatisfaction factor which correlates highly with incumbent wins when adjusted for retirement.

A final troublesome area of research is the primary election which occurs in Washington when more than two candidates file for a position. This data is often hard to collect because districts tend not to keep it and forget the primary information by the time the general election occurs. Primary data is important to collect because while fewer citizens vote in the primary, the general election data yields an artificially low number of challengers. Primary elections appear to be held in very few districts and newspaper accounts of these elections, word of mouth through professional organizations, or past history of districts apt to show high conflict may turn up enough that this information can be solicited by phone calls or selected mailings.

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